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ROLES FOR UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVING OUR WORKING RELATIONS WITH PEOPLE

One of the areas which must be given attention in order to improve our working relations with people is the identification analysis and practice of roles necessary for group formation, group growth, and group productivity. The term roles in this context means the particular function performed at a specific moment in our relations with people in helping them to become a group, to work productively as a group and to grow as a group.

Roles identified in this analysis make no distinction between leadership and membership functions, between leader and member roles but instead classifies them into three broad groupings, (1) group task roles, (2) group building and maintenance roles, and (3) individually centered roles.

1. Group task roles -

These roles are related to the task or problem which the people are deciding to undertake or have undertaken. The function or purpose of these roles is to facilitate and coordinate the efforts of people in the selection and definition of common problems, the solution of these problems and the execution of decisions. Any one person may enact more than one role in any given unit of participation. A wide range of roles may also be enacted by any one person in successive participations. Any or all of these roles may be performed at times by the group "leader" as well as by the various members.

2. Group building and maintenance roles -

The roles in this category are those oriented towards the relations of people and their functioning as a group. These roles are most important in group formation - forming an aggregate of people into a group. These roles tend to strengthen or maintain the group way of working, to improve, to regulate, and to perpetuate the group as an integrated and cohesive group. Any given contribution may involve several roles and a member or the "leader" may perform various roles in successive contributions.

3. Individual roles -

This category of roles are those participations of people directed towards the satisfaction of their individual needs rather than needs of the group. Their purpose is not relevant either to the group task or to group building or maintenance. Recognition and control of these roles is highly relevant to the problem of improving our working relations with people insofar as such insight is directed towards improving our individual maturity and task efficiency in groups.

All people play roles or perform a particular function in any given situation or unit act. Most people have some awareness of these roles but haven't given much thought or study to identifying them or to establishing a vocabulary for discussing them. On the following pages is a list of some of the roles taken by people in typical problem-solving group situations.

Group task roles -

1. INITIATOR - Suggests or proposes new ideas or a changed way of regarding the group problem or goal, proposes alternate solutions, is an idea man.
2. OPINION SEEKER - Asks for value judgment, feeling, sentiment, thought, attitude, interpretation, inference, diagnosis. "How does it seem to you, what do you think, how do you feel, etc.?"
3. OPINION GIVER - Makes a value judgment; expresses a thought or attitude; makes an interpretation, inference, diagnosis. "It seems to me, I think, I feel, etc.."
4. INFORMATION SEEKER - Asks for clarification in terms of facts, evidence, examples, experience, pertinent to the problem at hand. Seeks cognitive clarification or structuring of the situation.
5. INFORMATION GIVER - Gives facts or generalizations which are "authoritative." Cites evidence, examples, experiences, pertinent to the problem at hand.
6. ELABORATOR - Spells out suggestions in terms of examples or developed meaning, offers a rationale for suggestions previously made and tries to deduce how an idea or suggestion would work out if adopted.
7. EVALUATOR CRITIC - Questions the "practicality", the "logic", the "facts", or the "procedure" of a suggestion or of some unit of group discussion. Subjects the accomplishment of the group to some standard or set of standards of group-functioning in the context of the group task.
8. SUMMARIZER - Defines where the group is now in its thinking or acting process. Main threads of development are pulled together to prevent confusion and to clarify. The person who pulls the ideas together in order to show their relationship and who suggests how they might work out in practice.
9. RECORDER - Writes down suggestions, makes a record of decisions or writes down the product of discussion. "The group memory." Reports this action to the members.
10. INTEGRATOR - Shows or clarifies the relationships among various ideas and suggestions, tries to pull ideas and suggestions together or tries to coordinate the activities of various members or subgroup.
11. ORIENTER - Defines the position of the group with respect to its goals, points out departures from, agreed upon directions or goals, or raises questions about the direction which the group thinking is taking.
12. PROCEDURAL TECHNICIAN - Expedites group movement by doing things for the group - performing routine tasks, e.g. distributing materials, rearranging the seats, etc.

Group building and maintenance roles--

1. ENCOURAGER - Praises, commends, agrees with, and accepts the contributions of others. Indicates warmth and solidarity, raises status, exclaims with satisfaction, pleasure or enthusiasm. Stimulates others to activity by giving them approval, encouragement, and recognition. Invites others to participate.
2. HARMONIZER - Mediates differences, makes rational attempt to reconcile disagreement, relieves tension in conflict situations, defers "hot" issues, "pours oil on troubled waters", makes a rational attempt to have all sides considered, sometimes reduces conflict by pointed and humorous anecdotes. Attempts in various ways to hold the group together.
3. STANDARD SETTER - Expresses standard for the group to attempt to achieve or applies standards in evaluating the quality of group processes.
4. ENERGIZER - Urges the group to move forward, prods to action, insists on achieving goals, completing what has been planned, attempts to stimulate or arouse the group to "greater" or "higher quality" activity.
5. FOLLOWER - Goes along with the movement of the group, openly accepts the ideas of others. Maintains participative attitude and interest while talking little or not at all, shows interest by facial and bodily expression.
6. EVALUATOR - Keeps record of various aspects of group process and relates such data with interpretations to the group for its own self evaluation of its procedures. Helps set standards of operation and seeks and urges the application of superior methods and procedures.

Individual roles -

1. DOMINATOR - Interrupts, embarks on long monologues, is over-positive and over-dogmatic, tries to manipulate the group, asserts authority, is autocratic, attempts to show superior judgment, tries to manipulate certain people by flattery, threats or conditional promises.
2. BLOCKER - Tends to be negativistic and stubbornly resistant. Disagrees or opposes beyond "reason." Tries to maintain or bring back an issue after the group has rejected or by-passed it. Attempts to block any action the group desires to take.
3. ANECDOTER - Relates detached incidents to build his own ego or status. Dotes on interesting happenings which do not have significance to the group.
4. PLAY BOY - Seeking status through a display of lack of involvement in the group's processes, cynicism, nonchalance, horseplay, and other "out of field" behavior.

5. SPECIAL INTEREST PLEADER - Speaks for the "farmer", the "grass roots" community, the "housewife", usually posing his own prejudices or biases in the stereotype which best fits his individual needs.
6. RECOGNITION SEEKER - Works in various ways to call attention to himself, boasting, reporting on personal achievements, acting in ways that will help him in a "superior" position.



